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WINE WITH PHARAOHS

By

Jean Fox DeMoisey Jr.  
B.A., University of Louisville, 1998

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of the  
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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of English  
University of Louisville  
Louisville, Kentucky

August 2013



WINE WITH PHARAOHS

By

Jean Fox DeMoisey Jr.

A Thesis Approved on

April 18, 2013

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Professor Jeffrey Skinner (Thesis Director)

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## ABSTRACT

### WINE WITH PHARAOHS

Jean Fox DeMoisey Jr.

April 3, 2013

This manuscript contains poems linked by thematic, structural, and stylistic concerns. Thematically, the poems explore a subject's search for satisfactory connections to people, to place, and to culture; the role of language, and of possibilities for its usage, as both might pertain to such a search, is of vital interest. The order of poems intends an evolution of understanding, one explicit in the content of the pieces and also inflected poetically in the various deployments of the genre's conventions and devices. In conjunction with subjects explored, *Wine with Pharaohs* reflects a processing of origins and influences; a series of intertextual conversations take place also in something of an evolutionary sequence.

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## **WINE WITH PHARAOHS**

Let's talk time, *Fortuna*, dashboard goddess  
bobbling "Yes" in a grass skirt—time for this  
fool who hoped to be holy fool, who crazed  
and drunk threw snake-eyed dice  
in defiance of your great wheel.

Grant me three weeks to throttle the wild.  
Three weeks anointed with lecherous concoctions:  
musk-smears, love's brines and salves.  
Three weeks to stalk sunrise flamed on eastern knobs,  
blood scenting in nostrils; to don like a breastplate  
the tumid chest of a schoolboy impish with myth  
and bravado, boy poised brassy before the Janus face  
of day and sepulchral dim preluding darkness.  
Three weeks for youth before fall.

Grant me three weeks for wisdom accrued  
of books, legends, and Cosmos.  
Three weeks for brochures and travel;  
a stop to consider prophecies etched in rune  
and shadowy fathoms of Stonehenge.  
Provide all in line a cup to take wine with pharaohs,  
verities of the pharaoh's vine, afternoons to study  
in tombs, lost ciphers for riddling a Sphinx.  
Make of the square an agora of ancient forms.  
Make a kiva. Fill it. Light what time concedes  
and being can embrace before flying apart.

Grant me three weeks for song-symbols and rhapsody.  
Three weeks to spread naked on a rooftop with a foot  
in the stars and launch surreptitious rockets toward  
a mandala of planets and dreams;  
the further I read the less I am able  
to envision in this billow of enumerated science—  
I lie here for my brain to regress.

These last weeks, as solstice wanes and your wheel  
slows, clicking like Mayakovsky's pistol, toward a final slot,  
I will eat under a sycamore, on fallen bark an osseous  
white and leaves, shaded, silent among words.



The hour for departure approached, I will want  
to find a transcendent thought already in the minds  
of those whose affections I sought, something said  
like a fool's gold spike to hang it all on, all that might  
endure—changeable terms, war, upending and undoing.

## AESTHETICS IN GHOST CANYON

Moon shot—bull’s-eyed heaven—center margin, left and right—  
terrestrial Hernandez, and the Great Mystery’s gauzy breath regent on high—  
beyond this a blackened third: etheric speculation, REM’s desert sky—  
Below moon, adobe church—wire-to-post fencing—mottled brambles—  
speckled grass butted between grave markers and pale crucifixes—  
umbra of mountains patiently encroaching—a thirsty tree.

Ansel Adams—retinal images lifted—touring posthumously in cellophane,  
archival dust and crates—arrived at the Speed—points of light still swelling  
to push into figure a promontory—to forward forms that flashed an essence—  
to confine momentarily one chord from El Capitan’s tonic trill—to canvass  
for chiaroscuro contours nominated—geyser or dogwood blossom—  
by a moment’s play in the hoop of recurrence—At that easement where man  
meets machine—a glass eye flashed in the narrow, and we have obversions  
Nature may not have seen.

His subject—peak, root, dune, pinnate leaf, or falls in alluvial fan—  
brought to relief through darkroom maneuvers—adventitious left to time—  
Mt. McKinley whitely domed, upheld by lake seconding its profile—vine on  
granite paused—bullroarers in rapids frothily repeating—Smokies at autumnal  
dawn, sunrays’ slant filigreeing leaves for a dance above shadowed lows  
where winter already walks—or spring hillside of Sonoma: storm’s misted trundles  
clearing its valleys—For patrons—human in scale and duration—left by Adams’  
virtuosity each scored fugue of pitches held atremble—a moment’s wild rumble  
and response—dislodged from context—overawed and wondering where to fix  
material habit—how to conform by associative reach creatures of imagination—  
we caught—passing pragmatists—alone with images: foreboding, zeroed, still—  
some starkness there staring out—irrespective of perceiver.

Photographed, painted or penned—work worth the stretch of time—  
the singe of galvanizing conduction—in springs that house inspiration’s own  
hellfire concentration of heat—finds radiance—an alloy of forms—  
things composed, continuous at Point Imperial, in *Pipes and Gauges*—  
things dismembered, the severed stump—Too many petals or dewdrops  
on the blade, cheap gratification—too much finality ascribed to an archway’s  
bed of shade, trowel of spoiled earth on the palette.

Exiting at the end basement gallery—last of us following a thinned-out few up  
carpeted stairs—across marble—through orphaned leaflets and revolving doors—  
returned to drizzle and streetlights of a city on the river—buildings rowed conterminously—

a ghost canyon of modern design and cabs that prowl its floor—we stood, steam geysering  
from grates—satisfied—charged by fields animate between face and frame—each print—  
hung where walls plane space—where right angles corner clots of time—against monochrome,  
institutional white—a window onto roughness smoothed without loss, onto darkness lit—  
And there also—was an ideal—with the work, land—granite fractures, peace and power.

## THE SECOND THIRD

Since I left you, tromping puddled sidewalks  
trying to stomp our ontological "IT" out of Danville's introspective cement  
carrying on to where town ended without grace in railhead hinterland  
walking elsewhere now & muttering to myself as if the shadow behind me  
listened as you listened, hearing your voice in the creak of pedestrian shoes  
I have sought some of the sights then dreamily supposed by conversational sketches  
bequeathed forever in secret ink to the stranded walls of school buildings  
and businesses

the all-night insect light & speedball buses rushing loose in the main vein  
of Mexico  
the jungles vaporizing green, bloody-stepped ruins on a cliff, beaches depressed  
w/ sand and underground rivers of Yucatan  
the bridges, gypsy wax museums, parks trimmed in parsley, tea-puckered nostrils,  
water-warped books browned on benches at Piccadilly Circus, clockwork pigeons  
reveille escalators, and Ripper Walks to Ten Bells then riverside coupled along  
the wrung shroud of London  
the salons & cafes, milling galleries, metal bone towers, firefly sky of flashbulbs  
above the Arc, thin alley vistas, compact cars which cut & corner over cobblestone  
cubist cityscapes near swept piles of Nazi dust, shepherds on leashes of *savoir-faire*  
and graves spray-painted w/ beastly red-grit appellations for god  
in the cemeteries of Paris  
the spare apartments, songs in Dumpsters, last-call dives, courthouses & constipated  
psychologists, pinch of hetero-sex in bucket seats & whispered park hill penumbras  
of manly love, flashing barricades, broken sapling boulevards, fire-pokers & muskets  
strolls in mud made holy by Chernobyl glow of home-rolled cigarillos, & the ghostly  
shadow-grip of fingers bygone cast against a mushroom-pink motel & beneath  
lost trestles of the devil train in Louisville  
the girls of Louisville, porch doors gone slam in Richmond, strapless shoulders of  
Lexington courtyard, Indianapolis parking lots laid for love in allotted spaces  
skinny-dip pools, public or private, where played, waists upward in moonlight bare  
what may have been mermaids beneath the water; & later, on peninsula shore  
cream skirts espied at dusk followed hopelessly from crab-shacks in Destin.  
And who could have conceived the great crisscross of roads spread over the continent  
like screen on a green window—American highways, some sunning themselves  
south straight through Georgia, others having leaked northwest before coming of  
Great Plains winter: farm equipment frozen in gentle deep-freeze of white groves  
tumbleweeds held in fences like giant vascular snowflakes—traveling in twenty-foot  
trucks where each weary driver is sung softly along by the Kansas kettle-whistle of  
wind & tires' goodbye hiss

Colorado. It's in Colorado now—

at home in easy yawning mouth of the west w/ its billiard halls, ale, wanderlust crafts  
contortionists & poor street magicians, elk & coyote, eagle & stone perch of ram  
and everywhere in town girls wonderfully tall as if conceived by the spume  
of mountain water cascading from falls into their beautiful mothers—  
the ghosts of old Denver Five Points beatniks hearing all they want of jazz  
and there are incomprehensible parks here w/ roads 12,000 feet high & no guardrails  
just a harum-scarum view of wood crosses at the curve set blinding by argentine  
reflected sun on thaw of snowdrifts plowed aside, calling forth in end-all flash  
tipsy tears, trembling skids, and emboldened by last thought reenactment of those  
sure-to-have-been-young-also dead, no brakes  
and there are fewer churches or bumper-sticker chiasm caveats  
and it seems everyone is outdoors toting tents or skating campus rails  
biking w/ whizzing spokes down dirt paths, or on blankets laying out  
reading Kerouac in the grass  
But most of all, more than any repeatable thing, the figure of drama is clipped by  
distance here conveniently away from the discord of home, & contagious memory  
of discord, & the Mason-Dixon lynch-mob of mothers who hang their sons w/  
apron strings or beat them to death w/ a rolling pin in sad whiteouts of flour  
and Old Man Time, that life-sentence cellmate who always held his shiv to my throat  
has eased up & we're puffing peace-pipes, sitting around gesturing & writing together  
awake most days before the sun, who often beds down in a screwdriver haze  
touches the sky.

Since I left, that lame gray Danville sidewalk has stretched from sights into a life  
and I have missed you, wished you along, confiding thoughts to tabletops instead  
counters & chairs; writing in notebooks rebound w/ black tape, on receipts, envelopes  
cocktail napkins & hotel stationeries—notching marks, burying tokens—saying all  
otherwise untellable.

*Ft. Collins, CO*

**GIVEN PAUSE**

I have seen from a mountain

from beneath a hawk  
in the flap of its shadow

from behind a pelted sign  
that made assertions as I passed

from asphalt reflecting shattered glass  
and between white lines laid side to side

over shirt pleats, my right  
shoulder and the bluff

a section of land

maculate with  
sheds and khaki machines

covered like me in shadow

covered in an enclave  
while its neighbors are bright

by a group of clouds resting  
alone in an otherwise empty sky

which holds as it goes  
almost every shade of blue.

*Ft. Collins, CO*

## **OBLATION**

For you from mezzanines and a box of black jackets the flowers won  
For you five battalions to guard your veins  
For you to open without return is allowed through trocar of teeth  
For you firewood in observance of each slept hour  
For you euphonic song from a circle of blades  
For you small heaps of skin sit in the road  
For you quarter portion of words raised from a broken tablet  
For you meteors sign the sky, remedies compound, air hauls away smoke  
For you strawberries ripen and fall into weeds  
For you sad bottle of dust from seasonal migration or anklet of moonshine  
For you fibrous flesh and milk of the pod  
For you behind drywall olive drupes get imagined: sheath, shell, seed  
For you from hands bent in windowless study birds with pledges fly.

**BENEATH THIS LINE DO NOT DIVIDE**

How do I write what stubbornness insists?  
Earlier I attempted, said, "Halfway in bed I reached a fraction of the distance."  
And then, hitting like a rock shelf on the limits of language, concluded:  
"Tamped in tight, words by nature bend unforgivably  
at the edges what they would contain."

Seated here in the after-cold, ingathered, thought feels like a hand patting  
for some thin blue in which to wrap, as offering, a contracted chamber's prime cut  
to willowstalks in the marsh which would remind, or for a crystal glass  
to grind valves into feed for tossing at the contour of a bird that  
by flight reduces to a firm quotient airspace toward the horizon.

Tomorrow, you'll hand me your photograph—a moment, like a lingering soul,  
will become present in the room. From on shoulders of four elements, in a gallery of origins,  
appears the ghosted negative—lineament of human hand, palms damped by gray bay  
battleship waters, finger touching at ferry's rain-spattered window through stratum of space  
reflected light of its sibling form—vacancy reduced to a point, pinched invisibly between.

*Flagler, CO*



### **NIGHT'S LAST NOCTURNE**

When dawn thins fog along a ridge  
and banners of dream are broken,  
I want to move down the valley trail with you.  
By cast of day, as dust lulls through its  
amber joists and a limb cracks in the distance,  
I want to be confirmed.

"Find gainful ground," they will say later.  
You'll say, "steadiness." "Be strong," the press  
of your forehead on my shoulder suggests  
in a clearing spaced for August light  
and the hours settled there, as salmon  
swim purling cools and mushrooms number  
deep shadow—both of us shuttering still.

And I will. A sequoia, the giant whose roots  
have bored and knotted, so come shears of storm  
you may grab onto me as I prepare  
only for this. I will be wide for your shade,  
old for your counsel, become tall  
so you may climb the height of your desire.  
I will go first to make way, stand last  
so you can lie near, sheltered  
as I absorb some part and hold life  
after in the pages of my leaves.

*Muir Woods, CA*

## **MARIPOSA**

Two eyes of bougainvillea conquering cobbled wall  
One eye of aqua glimmer cutting current, spent by tarpon scales

Two eyes shafted in virile bamboo, ringed circuit stalks of cross-seminal chlorophyll  
One masked eye of moonrise cloud behind an empty hotel

Two eyes cunning, a pack's lead dog crossing first a dangerous road  
One eye in fuzz on the crown embowered of a baby sleeping under fronds

Two eyes of clothes that have kept their color on wash-lines between a tin hut and a tree  
One eye extending like a boardwalk into the bay, antenna for reportage of sea

Two eyes distinct shades of slate as the water at three depths inestimable blues  
One eye of gestation, black as corral, dense as a midmost point between sister stars

Two eyes like glasses of sangria left warm on the bar, barometers of dry wind  
One eye last of lamplight in a window, kerosene leveled against darkened cliffs.

*Negril, Jamaica*

**“PASSWORD ‘PRIMEVAL’”**

“Words, a wanting: root words whose whispers to the mind  
sound what is underfoot, quick consonants that can  
articulate a notch between limbs in the popular notion of a tree.  
Words, amphibian: vowels with scales whose purposive strokes  
wake like an arrow’s shimmery shaft-feathers on the coffee bean  
surface of a vast mind—

surface of a vast mind—  
catching and reflecting blue light and flattened verges of cloud  
back to overhead sky; white masted trunks ringed with dark circles  
as they rise back to riverine trees; stinkbird profiles back to stinkbirds,  
perched and turning head tufts together on deadwood  
jutting from shallows, or to a male who crashed into waterside bush  
once wings flap still.”

At the bottom of stairs which climb hill to lodge, this basin  
where a transplant to San Francisco—renting in North Beach,  
stirring cream into coffee at Caffè Trieste, haunting  
Fillmore for Six Gallery’s ghost—lifted off from SFO  
in a metal pill slipped between blue bay and sky

might journey at some expense to see, to hear, to reflect,  
to lay “shaft-feathers on the coffee bean surface of a vast mind.”  
Might stand and think of standing. Might stare, symptomized  
with a white-fever bug whose buzz is desire, whose buzz  
is the disease, the vector, non-native, invasive, carried  
to virgin forest in his blood, the desire to compose—  
first of ritual, the need, the ritual need  
he knows to walk to water, to kneel

“and rinse the Columbus Ave. tack /  
from flytrap hands / mottled now  
with specks and wings.”

*Tambopata National Reserve, Peru*

### **HAVING WALKED IN THE WAY OF WILD THINGS**

I stand here. I wait for lunch. Fried plantains,  
saffron rice on a palm leaf plate.  
A maroon hat from REI bought to cover my bald  
head flops its shadow onto mud beside the landing.  
There will be travel pictures of that travel hat, fretted  
brim reaching level bangs over silver sunglasses rims.  
It will hover over canoes, over rainforest paths,  
over droppings in pelleted black piles and the dim maw  
of a tarantula burrow where mother and babies wait  
for nighttime hunting—even over the heights of Machu Picchu,  
set too far beneath for its shadow to reach...Machu Picchu,  
a LAN Airlines flight, train and predawn bus ride  
after the Amazon.

I wanted to stand alone in Tambopata National Reserve  
on the shore of Lake Sandoval.  
“Ten minutes till lunch” released our group, knotted  
outside the dining area after a morning walk,  
toward mosquito-netted rooms.  
I wanted to hear by myself the forest, sounds just happening  
to happen, between the lodge and landing.  
I know very well nature has no heart, but turned to go,  
refrain of Zen instruction tapping my shoulder  
like a rōshi’s staff: *Walk mindfully*. I listened over tinnitus  
for verberations of an ecosystem breathing, imagined exotic  
creatures moving every rattled leaf as the last plastic  
on lace tips clacked snaggle-boarded steps—  
sturdy brown and blue hiking shoe from L.L. Bean,  
birthday gift from my mother.

At the bottom of stairs which climb hill to lodge, alone,  
I stand, listening for a whisper, a secret, and words  
from it I can use.

At the departure point where ropes are crosshatched  
to hold canoes, where the Peruvian trinity of anaconda, jaguar,  
and condor might convene at dusk to dine or drink,  
I see my legs reflected back to me in olive cargo pants,  
pockets bulgy as if for guerilla ammo, tattered pant cuffs  
hung to rubber heels. *OLD NAVY?* My heart I had hoped to

entrain to nature's own eurythmic tattoo  
beat in an olive t-shirt *dah-do-dah-do*,  
"ROOFING SUP. / POWER TOOLS / HARDWARE" patch  
factory-faded on the front, stitched in red thread. *GAP*.  
Pants and shirt sale-rack specials. Six years good wear.

And the reflection, like the bistro window  
off Mission St., except for knees, belly and armpits  
soaked dark with sweat. This man in a hat  
who it seems has followed me, looking through  
tinted lenses back at tinted lenses, trying to hold  
still enough to see—  
Thursday sun comes gently between buildings  
as it now spreads between trees, disturbed at last  
not by *Anabelle's* stenciled on plate glass,  
but by eyes watching from a table on the other side.

*Tambopata National Reserve, Peru*

### TRUTH PROCEDURE

Alchemy, alembic, flask, tube, flame, *Hermetica*, (~~elixir~~).  
~~ars poetica~~, *daemon*, line, *furor poeticus*, (meaning), stanza, Poetry.

(~~epiphany~~) "Lashed to a fifth lodge pole, ayahuasca gone /  
like 'The Riverman' to fetch visions"

(~~renunciation~~) "Mendicant. A season's bone-picked hunger  
pacing glacial valleys, / left to beg water of rock's depressions"

(~~surrender~~ and pain) "Flog. Pierce. Clasp. Steeled mortification  
of manful / flesh, a last inch soft and pink"

(~~purgation~~) "Firecure. Hawing consonants of Purge / doubling  
their issue in ash / on dusk-sheeted muslin, the secret, / smoked out  
like bees, / of things that walk and eat, / sleep as they are"

*Puerto Maldonado, Peru*

### ...A THOUSAND WORDS.

1.

We departed. Five minutes overtime after an on-time tour.  
We ride in a white transport van, assigned seats where  
chunks of yellow foam break through tears.

Second from the window, I sit, left lean-to by  
the engine's stuporous song between there and a dream,  
maybe a *Lonely Planet* scene from Arequipa,  
next bolded name on the glossy map.  
Hatted heads drum headrests. My gaze, dull,  
wanders without subject through dirt and bug specks  
on the glass while we make a bumpy descent to hostels  
from Sillustani's funeral towers in Southeastern Peru.

I ride. Slouching, dumb—camera capped, strapped, dangling  
in the aisle—expectation tossed toward the day's pile of stuff  
like a dirty shirt.

This is just when the sun retires from spinning  
fields of straw into flaxen gold, when the last good skylight—  
finale of pastel smudges and swirls—fades toward dusk.

And this is just when a great moon no one knew  
was in attendance would peek over a hillside  
as onto an afterhours stage once the tourists,  
the tame and the lame, have left,  
would peek over the hillside like a proscenium.

The moon—whose career I had tracked, a fertile cycle  
in Quechuan land,, from slivered play on lilies  
of Sandoval Lake, through its halved hushing of Cusco's bells;  
and now, to an arid winter in Puno. entrepôt on Titicaca's lip,  
last seen yesterday evening, an ovum, swelling,  
star-flanked, while walking home from Casa Diablo bar,  
apparently, as I talked with a companion,  
a few days from complete—rose full.

Turned onto that straightaway, wheel left to play  
under driver's thumb. Ten minutes into dinner hour  
and some miles off still, the moon, wholly enthroned,

cinched a treble conjunction with road and mountain  
as it climbed clear of the foothills sprawling ahead.  
A gigantic dip into the atmosphere. An alien disc, a demigod  
whose white light looks like the sound before a violin,  
a lucent hush that lays a sense of blessing onto this road briefly ours,  
onto shadowy slopes where we would not step, some lower drape  
of heaven held away.

2.

Moon. Crowned once with horns. Milk of Luna pooling  
in eyes, haunted nocturne of ivory keys, on sleeping seas  
recasting what day may do. Its portal, gypsum quarried  
from dark shafts, doorknob that turns to space.  
Its log of ocean nights, dolphins leaping to watery sparks.  
Its impressions of creatures born in the cool of its swaddle,  
remains it calcified, burial it gifted with light—

bead of light in an inky blot Ansel Adams caught over a cemetery  
in Hernandez, New Mexico.

Moon. You trained Perseus from his native shore.  
Moon. You of the moon temple that made white gold of its floor.  
Moon. You who entered white as the nurse's cap my grandfather's  
last hospital room, who used a reflective inch of fallen snow for my father  
to drive a few seconds on the interstate home without headlights,  
moment of magic and relief, son and grandson.

Moon. You who came to Peru to visit mountains, fields,  
and peoples of the Earth; to meet me, it felt, a man  
now on his farthest journey.

3.

Mountain. Not hill or hummock, but land in upright density  
whose calls to space needle the sky, and by each peak's stand  
against passing millennia—spanned with winds, waters,  
the sandpiper whetting its beak—the nut tree, Aymaran farmer,  
totora reed and grasshopper find their range.

As a mountain talks with what is timelessly above.  
As a mountain cultures wonders in valleys and caves, in cirques  
and tarns, at river-bends, behind falls, under cliffs' protruding lips.  
As a mountain brews in cauldrons menacingly sublime weather.  
As it is fathering shoulder and also nurturing presence felt the way  
an infant would know its mother as a fixture over the crib of its coos  
and cries, so mountains remain.

As Robinson Jeffers found Carmel, an overlook, climbed and settled  
it with 2000 trees and stones rolled up from the sea



masonry and devotion made into a hawk tower—

now inhabited by tourists, not unlike chullpas of Sillustani—  
high country, a poet-husband's "inevitable place."

4.

Road. North Americans have laid and loved road, have dragged  
down its bitumen thigh half-bolted transmission bellies,  
exhaust pipe tongues, run tire tread fingerprints into its dipped napes,  
leaked oils and overshot fluids onto its sheeny hot distances.

Road. Talked over and teased out across county lines, state lines,  
across time zones and international borders by Kerouac, Cassidy, Kesey.  
Robert Frank's road, photo-poetical road: mythic white wear-lines  
like phosphorous glowing after a lit strip of Southwest horizon.

Road. Its centripetal tug, rocking crosswind, rumble-music.  
Its zero-visibility squalls of spring rain, summer heat-haze radiation,  
black ice in January turns. Its Cypress swamps, canyon spanning bridges,  
transected deserts where Joshua trees trace by like mile markers.  
Its screeching fishtails, swipes, spinning escapes.

Road. To *norteamericanos* new to the hemisphere,  
an other-dimensional parallel. And here, near Puno—below,  
before, and perfectly T-boned to where Earth pushed up in rocky  
pangs of geologic birth this mighty mountain bulge.

Road. Colored perfect evenfall indigo—snake stretched  
without flinch in form; line of visual score for Sirens to sing  
like Nina Simone of "More and More and Then Some," sing sweet  
and salty the sea-flat summons of open water; and divine part for  
passage bisecting rolls of field that tumble like two brown-tinted  
boys wrestling toward the world's edge.

5.

No photograph can be produced. No documentary record  
contains that moon. Nothing authenticates a traveler who saw those  
mountains or rode the road perfectly perpendicular, straight serpent  
whose tongue flicked scree at a mountain's base, hissing at obliquity,  
serpent god of asphalt.

None on the transport had a moonrise to declare,  
no rounded summits to seal in glass. There will be no road  
driving toward the top of a frame in an office for eyes to travel  
seconds at a time, indefinitely; no evenfall fields of Southeastern Peru  
to pack back to the metropole as imagined periphery only a proud  
photographer can supply.

*Puno, Peru*

### **WITH TIN WHISKERS**

Writing, I stand, a live conductor  
available for poetry

between its direct current  
in thunderheads of an outer world

and artifacts to be etched  
by alternations of its charge—

through concavity, a subjective lens  
I watch, a man with an iron

rod from the garage  
aimed at the heavens, tuning, provoking

as trees, steeples, flagpoles  
and pedestrians are struck—

arms ever aloft, toes balled in rubber boots,  
bracing, hoping to help to ground

one illuminating strike,

accepting of a second's glow,  
the briefest shiver.

*Cusco, Peru*

**'HACER PUCHEROS, HENRY': BERRYMAN IN PERU**

The boy   brindled in corner chair,  
patio's shaded space overhung by thatching,  
fan blade slow-dices above slim stalks (of light)—  
    new yellow crayon   with yellow wax   (the boy)  
writes BIG slogans on a wall

Writes slogans—bigly—on a wall  
before his slingshot fires gravel  
at anything passing, "might or ought,"  
overhead—at cloud-thrones in sky of blue  
exhaust trailing "love the world" like itchy wool

Fired gravel, punctuating wicked points,  
before deriding the fatuous   blab  
of families under white umbrellas—their voices  
mallets of cavalry's long nails whose stigmata  
song he dreams— boyish brow racked in furrows

of unrecognized penance, unoriginal sin—  
feet resting on two green bowls turned down  
before him, right hand on the dog   Black & Tan  
of his hungry refusal.

*Cusco, Peru*

## **WHITE MAN'S BURDEN**

1.

Slow flow by watercraft. I bow toward bending.  
With weight, under baggage, caught on things, pressed;  
also casting low, looking limbo, swarthy space leveled  
beneath the bar—

like a jaguar's spots,  
pattern helping shade erase a golden hind as it returns  
to forest darks, or low foliage escorting tamarins  
to the floor.

I host insurgence. An outside, Shining Path  
foot soldiers, hot barreled, dried blood on wooden butts,  
one might admire, advancing in; an inside,  
frightened townspeople with toddlers and valuables  
evacuating out—

a firefight I see in that rippled face met leaning  
over still water. Those hairy arms, viceroy or imperial  
policeman oaring at the paddle. Sheeny watch band.  
Shading hat. Sunglasses. Glare of foreign skin.

And then, unable to trust myself to keep it once  
I've noticed, even this simple three-beat rhythm—  
Pull-one-two, pull-one-two.

2.

I follow a tribesman who summoned me from dinner.  
Long table set with skinless chicken, sides, ice water carafes.  
From talk with guests, fans breezing sticky necks.

From settled headland, alone at night, generators  
rumbling in back to keep the hilltop globe aglow until nine,  
led into heartland, dark of inner onyx—into silence,  
another kind of speech.

Paths lead to paths no longer paths. His steps search  
for snakes—pit vipers, night-biters—I asked after at lunch,  
holding close to my face a mason jar: juvenile afloat  
in brown liquid.

And behind, my little flashlight waves like a flare  
for a ceasefire to this uncivil war notions of color wage  
with white over annexed interior received at birth—

its rightful governance, its culture, the time  
and measure of its music, its bones, its many tongues?

*Can I be more than a ghost, generously intended,  
invisible to himself—misbranded child of a slave trader  
and his procuress, straight-haired mulatto,  
locked one summer night together in the barracoon?*

*Tambopata National Reserve, Peru*

## **MADRE DE DIOS**

### **1. DESIGNS AND BARRIERS**

Visitors may not swim in Madre de Dios. There is no baptism for the brain to be reborn as currents pull it flush with what on land, in sky and cove is exchanged, weighed, stored and spent.

How many tree-circling travelers wish to be reformatted by what they suspect forbears forgot—the something or nothing to be done about calls of beast and bird crossing the breeze in zones where life less-stylized speaks? Echo, reecho. Reach, requite. Octaves of noted intent.

Let us only listen then. Or whirl, raising shamanic knees. Or yawp from totemist mouths and troop off to follow the trace of the *one call* piped through throats of weaver birds, veritable playback of the primeval voice that spoke the world. Let us follow a tremor of the *one vibration* waved on water by wings, beaten sideways by divining branches. To find the brown of the *one grave* from which green pioneers. To clap a soft supporting rhythm for the destruction dance which makes mortars of its drums and pestles of its sticks, living things ground to seminal paste, reddened by a rolling anther; orbéd gossamers of a web hung in sublime array, invisible with slightest shadow, web that with a shaft of light reveals in its weave, or stops a wasp wandering in flight.

### **2. PRELUDE OF PARALLELS**

There is no visitor initiation center in Madre de Dios. What transformations are here, we come to wonder, where butterflies carry off creatures' tears to make use of their minerals; where black caiman under cresses scan a lake's flat plane for the splashing of fleshy forms; where giant otters, Lobos de Rio, hold piranhas in their paws, gnaw them head and fisheyes first, quick crunching of scales and bones stirring a small space; where cicadas build towers as burrow-stoppers

like minarets of an auburn silence underneath which nymphs cloister  
years in readying for an ample life when the brief moment arrives;  
where lilies, open only to night, bear the moon-white  
of their breasts to swarming mayflies;  
where trees engage in arboreal vying of roots, a slow wrestling  
of leaves for light to hang on them like a medal on invisible ribbon.

### 3. THE PERTINENT QUESTION

The pertinent question may emerge, it is hoped, from water,  
may wick up a trailing cord and to a hand and dive, inquiring,  
through subcutaneous tissue into nerves— dispatch centers  
where instinct sorts its messages for muscles, hollowing  
in the whole a small chamber to produce a pulsing  
whistle, an ocarina, aliveness sounding—  
in full movement, an integrated part, a note.

A note sounding, a part blending, a movement filling—  
in a place where calculation of natural extremes carries  
each to infinity; where any eye may witness germinal immediacy  
in life which greets decay in the breach with orange caps of fungi.  
Each thing, skeleton of its own evolution bulging from it,  
nubs and digits— continuance, finicky, incidental,  
interleaved, the order laid so fragilely, shadow  
of a supermundane hand paused at the crest  
of follow-through.

The residual heat of an unnoticeable hand, fading  
orange and amethyst of its thermal print.

The squirrely agouti breaks Brazilian nuts, holes them  
while reliably forgetting a few to renew a dependent tree.  
Bats pollinate. Capuchin monkeys scatter spores.  
Quinine tree, healing and an odd port  
one can thrust an arm through.  
Rocks bleached with guano that could fertilize  
an herb garden. Amazonian rays touch Earth  
so perfectly as it rotates away, setting on the surface  
of Sandoval Lake while all day sustained with warmth and light,  
slowed with their bellyfuls, remove for sleep,  
and the nightshift clocks-in by the shadow of a limb.

Is this life invincible, the wrap of woody vines  
a confirming embrace of the goddess?

### 3. ROMANTIC'S DISAVOWAL OF CONTRAVENTION

*Less Than Nothing* has slipped onto domestic shelves.

Cultural theorists have held forth in living rooms, in travelers' houses locked and dark they stand ready to declaim natural balance 'mystifying ideology,' page after page recalling nature's two yellow eyes, snarl or hiss; its whimpers as the downy-furred and doe-eyed young are eaten.

*'Nature is chaos: ice ages, plagues, eruptions, sinkholes, asteroid craters.'*

But four days in Madre de Dios offer macaws on clay licks; howls and six species of simian silhouette in the treetops; eyeshine of alligators twinkling red in flashlight beams. Ash and asteroid debris are hidden; ice on a few glaciers melts to the south. We stand on green hills, sit dry in boats, walk with poles single file on paths, inoculated, sprayed with DEET, watching through binoculars and telescopic lenses an unruly wild stage natural balance.

#### 4. AN EARNEST REQUEST

'But wake us to the web we are part of,' an earnest request hand-gestures express, motioning toward sprigs of red flowers in a tree.

We have tissue for tears, sanitation workers who take things away. We have muggers in allies scanning streets for a poorly shouldered purse or flash of cash. We hear the crunching of batter on thighs and breasts. We find birds' nests knocked down, blue eggs broken; flowerpots smashed outside *Juicy Lucy's*, flies on sourdough crust. Help us know how to parallel the Walking Palm's medal of light and kapok's buttressed roots to the contest of Bradford Pears in small circles of mulch—"tree coffins," as horticulturists call them—outside dining patios and beer gardens; Tree-of-Heaven and Royal Paulownia thriving through cracks in abandoned lots and crevices between buildings and streets.

Wake us to sublimity in cartooned tags under an awning touched by the stylus of a morning sunray. Help us thread connections in night traffic taillights on highways, cross of contrails in the sky; to recall something wild in ambulance sirens, bottles shattering, bus breaks, winching and jackhammering— back in the land where we reside, leasing above offices, commuting through landscaped parks and fume tunnels, practicing the market's commensalism among business chains, bureaus and agencies.

As tourists hang from a trolley rail, what might we learn



from their eyes, from their postures flocked along the pavement  
of gridded walks, from the generosity and wonder in several languages  
with which their voices speak of our city two stories below  
open windows where we watch, looking down and out,  
hidden by a dim interior?

*Tambopata National Reserve, Peru*

**PHOTOGRAPH: OPEN DOOR, 2006**

There was a door on a hill in Cusco.  
Open, it led to an unsuspected courtyard—  
though Cuscans would know it—two long timbers  
recumbently propped, fuzzy-splintered in the sun.  
A pallet of potted plants, walls shellacked white  
and pink, drooping power lines silvered on top.

If such a door had been closed,  
it would lock mops in a custodial closet—  
broomsticks, buckets, bins three feet deep.

A door on the hill In Cusco was open.  
There is a picture. Through the lens,  
its doorway led to caulked lines crossing  
surfaces and underlays. Sophomoric spells  
glitter on wet concrete. One pane of glass  
sets a dark window. Overhead sun flattens  
a metal roof, or vice versa. Yellow graffiti  
hung “loco” above it.

It also led to private property.  
Mirages burn off when someone  
in a linty bathrobe walks out of his kitchen  
to a place tired couples sit for tea,  
kicks cigarette butts off a deck.

An open door is an invitation  
and a warning. Finding one, its knob  
turned and bottom nudged so you,  
of all passersby, would notice, perhaps,  
would poke at it with a camera case, lean in  
on left foot to peek around its corner; or so you,  
tactful among tactless tourists, would heed  
a warning and pull it to.

Maybe someone, foreign, a stranger, sensed  
the touchdown of your plane last week in Lima  
on the far coast of the country—leaving  
his door this morning as you sugared  
coffee in the bed-and-breakfast foyer,

perspicuously cracked.

“Take a picture now, and then  
write your poem,” the note left  
by an open door.

In Cusco, the door on a hill was open.  
A cobblestone sidewalk climbed the street,  
held to it up that hill like an old man takes  
an arm. It might raise toward tiptoe just  
when it descends toward train tracks  
and a pack of wild dogs—hills and valleys  
of homes tacked together with mud,  
metal, cinder.

Two blue-green plaques lie in place  
of two sandy stones. A blue wall, hinged  
together, meets a neighbor’s yellow—  
blue sprayed with red and yellow tags.

There is a photo. It props the door open.  
Inside, a courtyard. Roof of round, maroon tiles.  
Potted plants with pink flowers underneath  
on its porch. Paving stones almost washed  
out by ambient light. Behind, a white house.  
Other dwellings make up a distance, metal  
patchwork of their corrugated roofs, blurred haze.

Unseen, the man in his kitchen ties closed  
a robe, cigarette behind his ear.

*Cusco, Peru*

## **WALKING PALM**

As written by Whitman, no doubt with the pith and bark  
of your wandering personage in mind: the germ of sages  
is a constant form-taker—at first unrecognized, for we  
know not which they are or what good they intend.  
So stood you, toeing the ground under my boot-soles,  
quiet teacher's tongue hung some half-length of the trunk  
as a termite channel down from its brown and brainy nest;  
and there, roughly worked, your lesson, left on the wild  
after-hours blackboard of evening for students arriving  
on the trail, unwittingly matriculated, near dawn.

In the primary forest of Peru, *Socratea exorrhiza* gathers  
visitors around, its triangulate geometry soliciting questions  
even as guides reveal the pedagogue whose fame  
hides in the Latin of its name. It might teach a transitional  
course between autopoiesis and morphology, seminar of itself,  
roots ranged like the poles of a tipi tall enough to house a man;  
a thinly focused trunk, prolonged like a white heron's neck  
in flight over water, casting a spread of leaves  
into an opening in the canopy.  
And its curious base, as a reaction to shade  
thickening over how many hungry semesters,  
discovered how to walk, how to move from its bosky  
carrel and explore the forest floor, as much as four feet  
traveled in a year to locate its place.  
Descending first a root, feeler in the new direction,  
the tree begins to wither—perhaps like a packing,  
discreet behind blinds at night, apologetic and slow—  
those wed to what is to be quit.

Feet at the roots, staring up the trunk's mast  
to where the leafy muzzle fed in a sun-filled trough,  
parting white butterflies, the explanatory words  
of a guide arrive whose mortal time it is to teach.  
When a right place is found, a yawn in the leaf litter  
beneath an ample berth of light where one's neighbors  
none too closely dwell, the walking palm will firm its roots,  
remain to wander no more, bear fruit and grow.

*Tambopata National Reserve, Peru*

### **NOTE WITHIN**

We are each thrown around an autochthonic soul—  
near conception, a moment before birth  
admits consciousness to settle  
open spaces with its wares.

Like the keystone of an ancient arch,  
a soul carries clay sacraments in a shawl,  
sits as shepherd on the misty hillside,  
makes mountain music with fluted wood,  
is a binding of fertile statues  
where the face of the moon consummates  
the face of the sun.

Before Pizarro with his gold crucifix,  
before what was cleared was sold,  
before the concrete pour  
and wire was run in a sacred valley  
blotting forms godly once  
against the dark, celestial river,

it played unstudied,  
burned minerals in honor  
of the seasons of its fortune,  
followed its faith's high footpaths.

And called after now, it hums the way  
one's ears ring with the quiet of a cathedral,  
huddled in some less-busy relief of being,  
weaving blue images into a swatch of cloth,  
keeping in inherited time the measured echo of its tune,  
willing to climb from a kapok tree  
or rise through the subterranean stoop of a forgotten door—

to sing with us,  
no matter how our cities have us estranged,  
no matter how graceless the feel of pocketed hands  
we don't know what else to do with.

*Pisac, Peru*

### **SUNDAY MORNING IN THE FINANCIAL DISTRICT**

These buildings— conceived by the rich,  
arrangements whose geometric tempos  
tighten with height, rise in pitch—  
aim at divinity,

wearing the robe of sunrise  
lofted tall against a light  
and gentle dome, almost procreative  
in the purple of its hue.

These buildings—bloomed from the brass  
of ornate entrances, zoom skyward  
with sides of sectioned glass  
that frame as many suns—

taken together, inter-reflecting,  
they seem, with dawn, chance canticles,  
a choir singing of the inadvertent  
excellence of men.

*San Francisco, CA*

## IN APRIL

1.

Steady rain showers spring grass and magnolia  
branches of chittering birds, muddies patches  
where plywood from postponed construction  
laid too long.

April has fractured winter's slate—long gray slab  
four degrees above freezing whose fissures leaked  
a season of evening sleet onto fields baled  
and drab. It's split—shipped north  
by ceil tumbles of cloud.

2.

Yesterday I awoke in a motel room, my arms  
around a woman whose scent—like something  
awake, scampering or scudding, washing a dusty  
watercourse—stowed itself among clothes  
stuffed in a duffel.

Her scent—salt on iced stoop, light on frozen  
limb or sunward window—bottled by a wadded  
breast pocket, now loose. Organic soap and shampoo,  
rinse of coppery water through old plumbing, lotion.  
Hoppy microbrew, liqueur, lemon-twisted bourbon;  
an appetizer's pinches of jasmine, rosemary, ginger.  
Midnight smoke from wet wood, hot tile,  
hot stones.

And, tingeing back, roosted onto the rest  
the life-breath of my kisses—spent like tokens  
at an arcade; stamped white in ultraviolet on wrists;  
hung from collar bones; bricked on bending vertebrae;  
poured, thick, as olive oil pours, into ears hot  
and hair-hidden.

3.

Watch a traveler coming to at seabird calls.

Sled tracks trailing off, parallel across frozen expanse  
from an isle of snowy volcanoes; two thumbs warming  
from blue. See doldrums' slight eddies  
and undercurrents, spinning volutes nearly visible  
where water shows sky to itself—first creasing jag,  
squibbing, that makes a smile “wry,” bending there  
with a cogent thought, one of scrapes  
and thaws.

Next, see him home in a room, awl hole  
in the bible belt—quarters, dry, warm, a serviceable  
setting for thawing thoughts.

There is music outside his door. Sonorous figures  
gather, things of voice. Notes which are ghosts,  
dry sheets rustling on a railing. Notes such that their  
very waves of arrival swear out a warrant to haul before  
the town in churchy white and chains any fugitive  
runs of expression.

Notice then, punched against it, chin down  
and swinging elbows, his own basement music—  
playlist echoing underground in the register of roots  
and bones. How its fire gives cover, its heat holds off  
a while miasmal frost, flame sucking a little  
at scents on a shirt, at tinder of freshly sheaved  
memories.

4.

There is the junction, seasonal crossroads,  
three shoeless devils brawling below and an angel  
applying lipstick above. Where X marks a spot,  
the fork has not yet forked. A white waste  
the likes of which no real winter ever was  
gives way—set straight just there on a recovered chair  
and eager after 18 months of Januaries to touch language,  
I sit, an antenna, an axial pole.

“Lover Man” pokes a golden-rayed bell  
from the speaker—perked like a groundhog half out  
of its hole—and weaves with a longing sway sweet  
mourning from its mouth. Warm phrases like vines  
climb around and ring each of four rickety legs.  
Limpid fingers of a blind pianist play fishpond lily pads’  
bubbling keys in a garden just off the patio; goldfish flops  
sound base licks; in the corner, a breeze comments  
on expensive chimes.



And a mild hangover, hesitant, mist outside  
an open door, meets coffee, black and strong and sexy,  
who invites it to dance, to a twirl in this body. Bungalow  
by night, café come sunrise—this body— its frame  
an un-shelved instrument, trumpet of throat-moistened air,  
thundering heart-drum, strings of love-stroked muscle.

This healthy body, a body those knotting knots for noon  
service might shun.  
Despite its good uses, its hymnody.  
Despite its soloing revels, its celebration.  
Despite this seasonal song sprung from salt and nutshells  
of a danced-upon stomach.

5.  
Sitting, asway as in a tree or catamaran  
at sea, words spin dizzily. Be with rhythm.  
Be with the rise of a sweet smell from tameless skin.  
Be with language. See letters match and mate  
breeding phrases on a keyboard. Play away like Art Tatum  
might if there was a tune called “Juvenescence in Five Parts”  
and he could reach down and touch a sunlit canyon of hoodoos  
cut by the drift of a woman’s scent.

Ride a planet firm and flowering as it twirls  
through space. A world wired and drunk and delicious;  
world that wails all night, before and after hours, blows by,  
around, and right on through the suspicious sidelight of far-off,  
incorporeal kingdoms.

Today it’s no trouble to be in spring, to have bodies  
bloom tulip trees; yellow forsythia; April purple  
of Eastern Redbud— and dogwood clusters, white,  
innocent and brief.

*Cox’s Creek, KY*

### **RITE OF SPRING**

Thinking of you, overnight deluge  
now passed, clouds browse the moon  
as leaves of a wood drip on in the dark.  
Sunrise will show creeks crested along bridges,  
crop-ready fields flooded with silty water,  
every outside thing drenched and beaded.

With a few days' sun, waters recede.  
Streams calm. Sediments settle.  
Earth set to absorb remaining puddles  
of its overflow—clinking rainspouts quiet,  
basements to be pumped and cleaned.

Then May spiderworts purple open  
for bees, native grasses grow to feed  
horses and cattle, to give bedding for a nap  
to their colts and calves, while bulls seek again  
their consorts, studs their mares, Red-tailed  
hawks from perches snakes and field mice,  
and scavengers, wide-winged in circling flight,  
something drowned.

When farmers' prayers are answered  
too emphatically, holdfasts lose hold—  
what surrounds, dammed or wild, rinses:  
clotted there, here clean,

while summer slashes and  
burns at the far edge of spring.

Thinking of you, overnight deluge  
now passed—after night's retirement  
where the goddess my left foot raised  
in rain and cattails from a bed of sunken tires,  
algae-greened as she climbed the pontoon's anchor,  
rubbed my right as I dreamed.

I join a world before daybreak, bubbled  
brown with silt or rust, later to welcome light too,  
some sandy dew cornered in the eye may prism

sunrise purple and orange—a vision,  
each ray archaically falling like wax on the seam  
of an unsealed letter.

*Cox's Creek, KY*

### **The TALK OF BEALE STREET**

If Beale Street could talk, its long teeth would be capped with neon tubes, its braces  
would light up, its asphalt tongue would be barricaded at both ends.  
If Beale Street could talk, it would pitch its wares, it would direct you to the company store,  
it would announce your anniversary, get your first name right, and thank you for coming.  
If Beale Street could talk, between white lines its words would come tumbling out, doing  
handsprings, young and bare-chested, applauding each other, turning tricks for tips.  
If Beale Street could talk, it would be the loudest voice in west Tennessee, a stage-lit solo  
in a room battered and dark and tobacco stained.  
If Beale Street could talk, it would shout down the first ethnic president from the talk radio  
of one of its cabs as a minority driver drops off two white passengers from the North.  
If Beale Street could talk, it would mouth a muted, side-street salute to Ida B. Wells.  
If Beale Street could talk, its emptied gut bucket would be in a display case with a gold engraved  
plate reading "Memphis's Original Gut Bucket"; it would be filled with sequins and glitter.

*Memphis, TN*

### **SIMPSONVILLE MASSACRE**

On January's 25<sup>th</sup>, 1865—an actual day,  
if pictured—under sun or clouds,  
mild or cold;  
day locatable on that sign if never  
to ink the white of secondary pages—

troops of Company E, 5th US Colored Cavalry,  
noted for battling in Saltville,  
marched 900 cattle from Ft. Nelson toward  
a Louisville stock yard and slaughterhouse.

These were men, not long removed themselves  
from ranks of living stock, nearly all recruits  
freed slaves, sent—surrendered  
to this lesser thrall,  
ankles raw, wrists too: not-yet-phantom itch—

with Enfield rifle-muskets to fare  
in the Civil War's final days, hoping to land  
beyond its open-air slaughter yards.

Simpsonville, 20 miles from Louisville,  
named for Capt. John Simpson, fighter  
in North West Indian War's Battle of Fallen Timbers  
and War of 1812;  
settled at west end of a county named for Isaac Shelby,  
governor and soldier who fought Indians  
in Lord Dunmore's War and the War of 1812.

On January 25<sup>th</sup>, downhill from town hall  
approaching the county line,  
185 Confederate guerrillas ambushed  
Company E from behind,  
closing quickly, six-shot revolvers in each hand,  
cylinders spinning to spit fire  
onto rear guard whose muskets conked  
due to fouled powder—

“conk,” dull thud, impotent quiet ringing,  
a gaping second's total cognition before terror.

The roadside sign blurs by coming to or from  
Simpsonville. Drivers or passengers commuting  
past at 55 may catch

“Horrible Massacre”

raised in gold on a dark sign sun patches  
cup and frame like a wood match in the rain.

Someone arriving on foot would find a small memorial:

white headstones, two rows in gravel lot;  
sign from the Kentucky Historical Society,  
half tied to Ft. Nelson in Nelson Co.,  
half to Shelby.

The Nelson side states “Horrible Massacre,”  
numbers dead “about” 22.

The Shelby, headed “African American Cemetery,”  
tells the civic story: “troopers killed 1865  
Simpsonville slaughter were buried in a mass  
grave by local residents.”

Historians might find something noteworthy  
in two sides, removing both  
from *presentism* with an incisive probe,  
scratching at erasures to resurface past  
moments, human shock.

Less advertent visitors, having noticed  
Shelby County’s skies and dead oaks swarmed  
black with buzzards, may consider other familiar  
sites that offered such beaks buffets of carnage,  
might squint into heat vapors as if looking  
into time itself, cock an ear toward a lull—  
farm trucks and semis on the other side of either hill—  
might hear an echo, or chatty child’s too-loud whisper  
as to whether any guerilla’s shade  
darkens their family tree.

And district English teachers, new hires,  
would certainly be disposed  
toward concordance—surnames and Christian—  
on class rosters and headstones  
in “Simpsonville Cemetery 1854,” town proper’s  
antebellum resting place;

would ponder multiple ways young readers  
could respond

to white and black, “confederate,” “slave,”  
“Horrible Massacre,” and “buried in a mass grave  
by local residents.”

*Simpsonville, KY*

## **HOLY DAY**

Couldn't today be a holy day

that carpet patch a prayer rug  
that pillow a gomden cushion

this spare room a cell

this building a monastery  
its property manager an abbot

and the leasing agent's skirt  
a bell of awareness

rung rhythmically by circumambulant knees  
as she goes past the window

her Chanel, smoke of sandalwood  
in spiraling upsurge

under the sun, the Great Eastern Sun  
rising over buildings which are the Himalayas?

And couldn't I be a climber  
cold, alert, breathing high colandered air

digging into the keys in search  
of finger-holds of stability

between each  
diagonal crevasse

sharpened pencil a piton  
in Nanga Parbat

notebook underarm  
travelogue of unseen massifs

ascending, maybe  
strapped to an olive pack



filled with prayer flags  
cruets of communion wine

and the broken-bread-body of the world  
unleavened, wrapped in cloth?

## **TO PLAN FOR THE PARTING OF THE WAYS**

*"Will you try to find some better expression for death?"  
(Shunryu Suzuki)*

From ashes raked, burning fire  
From dust returned, a body warmed  
From altar wine, circulating blood  
From fields' harvests, a heart made, a mind  
From gales skimming Appalachian mountaintops, a Pacific breeze  
neighbors' sighs, these laughs of familiar strangers and of friends  
spirit, a warm wind drawn in like thread and through

Days each ancestor struggled begot this day, my struggle  
Nights each ancestor lay with another, this night, my love  
Recently I move through cemeteries like a shadow  
Near one, the sounds of a sausage factory: groan, hiss, whistle  
same family name on the company sign and several headstones  
tethered goat across the thin access road chewing grass  
mound of ready dirt. Death's breath soughs overhead in evergreens  
flag chains clank on poles

I try to imagine the imponderable: being a body without consciousness  
I imagine how, from the vantage of a rise run each morning  
back to the entrance, mine might look upon frost or plastic flowers  
on its grave, that marker contrasted with others—some, night-lit  
flash blue, red, green; others, mossy, stay dark against the outskirt—  
I imagine sight with subterranean eyes, if it would register  
a difference between noons and midnights, weekdays or weekends  
underground. Exiting through the Simpsonville Cemetery archway  
birthed again between its cold black shins toward a morning moon  
two-thirds full, I hear the click of a turnstile

*Simpsonville, KY*

### **CLICHÉ OF ROOTS**

Sunlight in the Linden tree,  
cornflower sky, ground speckled  
by River Birch leaves' spaded shadows—  
over the fence, breeze swivels Miscanthus grass,  
tall blades plume.

A month from now straight-line winds will rip  
through the county in late October, wad up sheds like foil.  
A month from now, across the street and four doors down,  
half a neighbor's house will burn to the foundation.  
August has left heat and drought; December holds record snow—  
in April, Amelia and I will mulch and plant along the fencerow:  
blue and pink hydrangeas, crape myrtles, a young magnolia.

Shadows in the Linden tree, dahlia-streaked sky,  
peels of River Birch bark curled on shady ground—  
along the fence, Miscanthus grass saws and swishes.  
Leaned back, frothiest third of a beer now gone, mulling  
time scored by growth and pruning, buds and drops,  
seasonal sprays of color and the digging up of annuals.

I think of staying here, against our three-year plan,  
a bigger house, a little land.  
I imagine sitting in with them, kin with kin,  
each before autumns our own—  
and rainwater on the small statue of an elephant,  
white droppings covering its stony right eye.

*Simpsonville, KY*

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*Reed Magazine* [San Jose St. University] (Two poems)  
*River Oak Review* [Elmhurst College] (Two poems)  
*Sierra Nevada College Review* [Sierra Nevada College]  
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